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ABSTRACT

This report examines academic calendars at Illinois' institutions of higher education and presents data for the 12 public universities on the number of instructional days as well as the number of days that instruction was not offered during the 1992-93 academic year. Data are also presented on the academic calendars of samples of Illinois public community colleges and private colleges and universities. More generally, the report discusses the improvements in quality and productivity that can be realized by shaping the calendar to meet the needs of faculty, staff, and students and better utilize facilities and other institutional resources. Alternative calendars are considered, such as the addition of a third "regular" semester and rescheduling existing semesters to provide more time for student instruction and projects, as well as for faculty development and scholarship. The report notes that all but two of Illinois' public higher education institutions will have a semester system by Fall 1993; however, Illinois' private institutions have a greater range of academic calendars. The report also recommends that all institutions further examine their academic calendars to include a review of how effectively summers are utilized. (GLR)

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Item #5B
July 13, 1993

STATE OF ILLINOIS
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC CALENDARS OF ILLINOIS COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

This report examines academic calendars at Illinois institutions of higher education. Data are presented for the twelve public universities on the number of instructional days as well as the number of days that instruction was not offered during the 1992-93 academic year. Data are also presented on the academic calendars of samples of Illinois public community colleges and private colleges and universities. More generally, the report discusses the qualitative and productivity improvements that can be realized by shaping the calendar to meet the needs of faculty, staff, and students and better utilize facilities and other institutional resources. Alternative calendars are considered, such as the addition of a third "regular" semester and rescheduling existing semesters to provide more time for student instruction and projects, as well as for faculty development and scholarship.

Types of Academic Calendars

There are four major types of academic calendars in use on college and university campuses: semester, quarter, trimester, and 4-1-4 calendar systems. The semester calendar has two equal terms of 15 to 20 weeks in the fall and spring. The trimester and the 4-1-4 calendars are variations on the semester calendar. The trimester has three terms of equal length and begins at about the same time as the fall semester but runs through a significant part of the summer. Each of the three trimester terms runs for approximately sixteen weeks. Like the semester, the first term of the 4-1-4 calendar begins and ends before Christmas; however, unlike the semester, a one-month January term is used to offer intensive academic courses or non-credit educational programs. The quarter calendar has four equal terms of about ten-week duration. Three quarters constitute a normal academic year.

A report from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), *Academic Calendar Systems: A Cross-Institutional Analysis*, authored by Carol A. Hand, et al, summarizes a survey of different types of academic calendars used by higher education institutions in the United States. The study indicated that the semester system was the predominant academic calendar used by 57 percent of all institutions, while 23 percent of institutions used the quarter, and 20 percent the trimester, the 4-1-4 calendar, and other calendars. Over three quarters of institutions with enrollments of 10,000 to 20,000 students operated under the semester calendar, while nearly 40 percent of institutions offering less than baccalaureate degrees used the quarter calendar. By region, the semester was used by over 70 percent of higher education institutions in the Midwest, New England, and the Southwest, and by slightly over 50 percent of institutions in the Great Lakes, Plains, and the Southeast regions.

Academic Calendars of Illinois Institutions of Higher Education

The semester calendar is the norm among Illinois public universities. Only two public universities do not use the semester calendar. The quarter calendar is being used by Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville until the 1993 Fall term when the semester calendar will be implemented. The trimester calendar is used by Governors State University. All public community colleges use the semester calendar except the College of DuPage which uses the quarter system. Among the private colleges and universities, there are more exceptions to the semester calendar. For example, in the sample of ten private institutions examined for this report, the trimester is used by Knox College, the

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quarter system by Northwestern University and the University of Chicago, and the tri-semester system by DeVry Institute of Technology.

Board of Higher Education staff chose the most recent Fall 1992 and Spring 1993 terms as the academic calendar to be examined for public universities and samples of public community colleges and private colleges and universities. Summer sessions have not been included in the analysis because fewer students take courses during the summer and because summer school calendars vary widely across institutions. For the purposes of this report, the beginning of a term is identified as the first day of instruction and the end of the term is the last day of final examinations for regular courses offered on-campus. Weekend, off-campus, and night classes have not been counted with each institution's instructional days because such courses do not serve the majority of students. Major holidays and inter- and intra-term breaks comprise the count of noninstructional days.

Table 1 displays data for the academic calendars of the 12 public universities in terms of their instructional and non-instructional days. The Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville new semester calendar for 1993-94 is used rather than the quarter calendar previously used by the University. Excluding Governors State University, the length of the 1992-93 academic year varied from 177 to 189 days in which there were between 152 to 162 days of instruction. A difference of ten instructional days over a four-year period would represent about two months of additional instruction for a typical undergraduate student. The percentage of instructional days in the calendars of the public universities varied from 82 percent at Western Illinois University to 87 percent at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.

Starting in Fall 1993, Governors State University will be the only Illinois public university not using the semester calendar. The University uses a trimester system which has a significantly longer academic year and a much greater number of instructional days, as shown in Table 1. This calendar enables the University to reduce the number of weekly hours of instruction per course as a result of extending the number of weeks in a term. Students interested in a more intensive academic schedule can instead choose to enroll in a shorter term or "block" of one or two months duration that is offered during each trimester. Governors State University offers a flexible calendar that is designed to meet the needs of its student body many of whom are part-time adult students with extensive personal and employment commitments that require greater scheduling choices. It is reported that many students at the University vary their enrollment pattern registering, for example, for both a trimester semester(s) and a shorter trimester block(s) during a single academic year.

Table 2 presents data for a sample of eight public community colleges selected on the basis of location and urban and rural representation. The number of instructional days for the 1992-93 academic year among the eight colleges varied from a minimum of 156 days to a maximum of 165 days. The length of the calendar year ranged from 179 to 193 days. Instructional days represented between 83 percent of the academic year at Shawnee Community College to 88 percent at the College of DuPage.

Table 3 displays data for a sample of ten Illinois private colleges and universities selected on the basis of differences in mission, location, and institutional size. Among this group of private institutions, there were considerable variations in both the number of instructional days and the length of the academic year. The number of instructional days in the academic year of the private institutions ranged from 149 to 171 days, excluding DeVry Institute of Technology. Among these same institutions, the academic year ranged from 166 to 189 days. The three institutions using the trimester and quarter system had 90 percent or more of the days in their academic year devoted to instruction, while the remaining institutions using the semester calendar had from 82 to 89 percent of instructional days in the academic year.

DeVry Institute of Technology operates on a tri-semester system that offers three full terms during a calendar year. The Institute uses a compressed, more intense calendar in which students

enroll in more courses per term than at most other public and private institutions. Full-time students attending DrVry Institute of Technology usually graduate in three years or less of year-long study. This pattern of instruction enables the Institute to educate more students in a full calendar year, as well as fully utilize its resources during the summer semester.

Review of the data in Tables 1, 2, and 3 indicate that institutions in the three higher education sectors showed variation in the length of the calendar and the number of days in which instruction is offered. The percentage of noninstructional days during the academic year also varies among these institutions. For example, at public institutions, the data indicate that from 11 to 18 percent of the academic year is not devoted to instruction. Public and private colleges and universities should regularly explore how attendance patterns and instructional time can best be utilized to improve student and faculty productivity and quality of instruction.

Alternative Schedules and Uses of Existing Academic Calendars

Academic calendars serve student, faculty, and institutional interests. There is no single optimum calendar since institutional diversity requires varying schedules to meet different student and faculty needs. The existing academic calendars described above have been effective in serving students and faculty. However, there are alternatives to these calendars that should be considered that might offer opportunities for improving productivity and instructional quality. For instance, the traditional semester calendar can be modified by adding a third semester, extending the length of the existing semesters, or developing a compact semester system.

The addition of a third term of equal length to the traditional semester has two major advantages. First, a three semester calendar provides students and faculty with opportunities to engage in "semester-off tasks", for example, for students who wish to work or for faculty who wish to have an extended period to pursue a research project. In addition, students could take courses in three terms during the year and thus graduate in less than four years. In addition to potential savings in tuition and other student costs, earlier graduation permits students to seek full-time employment or begin graduate work ahead of students graduating in four years. The three semester academic calendar may also result in more efficient utilization of campus facilities and equipment, such as the library, dormitories, and laboratories.

Extending the length of the existing semesters reverses trends in the shrinking of the academic calendar which some critics have linked to a decline in the quality of undergraduate education. This alternative also would relieve time pressure on students and faculty because a longer semester potentially allows students to take more courses per semester and graduate in fewer terms. It also would provide faculty with more time for scholarship, research, lesson preparation, or student advising.

A very compact academic calendar could be constructed. Such a calendar would consist of a four-month semester that runs from August through November, a long December through January break, a Spring semester that begins in February and ends in May, and another long break comprising June and July. The two breaks of two month duration each in this calendar, afford students and faculty sufficient time to participate in focused projects and activities that cannot be completed during traditional short breaks between semesters.

These alternative schedules and variations on these formats can be used to improve the utilization of facilities and support services, expand opportunities for students, and provide greater flexibility for both students and faculty. Since most academic units, with the possible exceptions of colleges of education, significantly reduce their level of operations in the summer term, most colleges and universities can not fully utilize campus facilities and resources such as the library, dormitories, laboratories, and counseling services during the summer. Most support resources cannot be proportionately adjusted to smaller summer enrollments; for example, the library is either open and

staffed, or it is closed. Underutilization of these support resources can be avoided by either completely closing the campus during the entire summer or by taking steps to expand the level of activities of all academic units during the summer. Implementation of these alternatives and others summarized below must be justified academically and economically by having a sufficiently large numbers of students and faculty participate in summer activities to ensure that campus resources are not underutilized.

Campuses have quite a few days between the Fall and Spring semesters and during semester breaks when instruction is not offered. At public institutions, such between semester days varied during the 1992-93 academic year from a minimum of 13 days at Chicago State University to a maximum of 21 days at Western Illinois University. Improvements in productivity and the quality of instruction could be made during this period by encouraging greater student participation in additional study and learning activities and faculty involvement in professional development, research, and scholarship activities. Even greater productivity and instructional improvements potentially could be achieved by rearranging calendars to provide breaks of even longer duration, as noted above.

Students could use break periods to participate in focused research and other scholarly projects with faculty on-campus. With faculty leadership and supervision, other students could use the break for cooperative work activities, visits to other campuses, libraries, museums or to perform volunteer activities. Students also could enroll in intensive, for credit classes and seminars, called the Winter Interim at some institutions. Such seminars generally would be highly focused and often utilize outside resources such as corporate and political leaders, researchers, or visiting professors.

Faculty also can use the period between semesters for a variety of focused academic activities. For some faculty, the one- to three-week break is ideal for participation at meetings, conferences, or workshops as well as taking part in research and scholarship in learning centers such as libraries and laboratories. In some disciplines, particularly those in which the growth in knowledge or technology is very rapid, this period could be used to provide short-term sabbaticals for faculty to upgrade their scholarship or complete a project at an off-campus site. For some faculty, such mini-sabbaticals could be more affordable, flexible and productive than the traditional semester or year long sabbaticals that are provided to a faculty member on a traditional seven to ten year cycle.

Some faculty have research projects or scholarship activities that take six weeks to two months to accomplish. To serve the needs of such faculty, the calendar could be rearranged to provide the necessary time. Some students also could capitalize on such arrangements to obtain meaningful jobs, complete internships, or take independent study courses.

Conclusion

Most Illinois public institutions use the semester system as do most institutions of higher education in the country. By Fall 1993, all public institutions will have a semester system except Governors State University, which operates under a trimester system, and the College of DuPage which uses the quarter system. Illinois private institutions have a greater range of academic calendars. A study of 1992-93 academic calendars indicates that variation exists among the three sectors in the length of the calendar year, the number of instructional days in the year, and the percentage of instructional days devoted to instruction.

This report represents an initial examination by Board of Higher Education staff of current and potential use of academic calendars as a means of improving the productivity and quality of higher education. The calendar established for the academic year is a resource which should be conceived and changed according to institutional needs and goals. Studies have shown a positive correlation between increased instructional time and student achievement. Colleges and universities should examine their calendars to ensure that they promote quality in undergraduate and graduate education. Institutions should also carefully consider whether their calendars benefit students and staff and best

utilize institutional resources. Inter- and intra-semester breaks present opportunities for learning and staff development and should receive the same consideration as days scheduled for instruction. Institutions are encouraged to further examine their academic calendars. These examinations should include a review of how effectively summers are utilized since most institutions do not fully use their facilities and staff at this time. Alternative schedules of credit and non-credit programs that might better serve student needs and more effectively capitalize upon institutional strengths and resources also should be examined.

Table 1

SUMMARY OF ACADEMIC CALENDAR OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES
FOR FALL 1992 AND SPRING 1993 SEMESTERS AND TRIMESTERS

INSTITUTION	Fall 1992 Instruction Days	Spring 1993 Instruction Days	Fall/ Spring Total	Week Days Between Terms	Holidays/ Semester Breaks	Total Days	Instructional Days as % of Total
Chicago State University	78	79	157	13	13	183	86
Eastern Illinois University	78	81	159	17	12	188	85
Governors State University Trimester Calendar	72	147 **	219	20	6	245	89
Northeastern Illinois University	76	76	152	15	10	177	86
Western Illinois University	77	77	154	21	12	187	82
Illinois State University	80	79	159	14	11	184	86
Northern Illinois University	77	79	156	19	10	185	84
Sangamon State University	80	79	159	20	10	189	84
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale	79	79	158	20	11	189	84
Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville	81	81	162	15	10	187	87
University of Illinois at Chicago	77	79	156	19	9	184	85
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	79	82	161	17	10	188	86

** The Spring Instructional Days is the sum for Winter and Spring trimesters.

NOTES:
Instruction Days do not include Saturdays and Sundays as well as days for oreintation, registration, and commencement when instruction is not offered.

Days Between Fall and Spring Semesters do not include weekends.

Public holidays and recesses include Easter break, Fall and Spring breaks, Labor Day, Abraham Lincoln Day, Martin Luther King Day, and Thanksgiving holidays. Some campuses do not observe some of these holidays.

S.I.U. at Edwardsville's calendar is for 1993-94 when the semester calendar is implemented.

Table 2

SUMMARY OF ACADEMIC CALENDAR OF SELECTED PUBLIC COMMUNITY COLLEGES
FOR FALL 1992 AND SPRING 1993 SEMESTERS AND QUARTERS

INSTITUTION	Fall 1992 Instruction Days	Spring 1993 Instruction Days	Fall/ Spring Total	Week Days Between Terms	Holidays/ Semester Breaks	Total Days	Instruction Days as % of Total
Belleville Area College	81	81	162	14	13	189	86
Illinois Central College	81	81	162	20	11	193	84
Kennedy–King College	77	79	156	15	8	179	87
Lake Land College	80	84	164	14	12	190	86
McHenry County College	79	79	158	15	10	183	86
Carl Sandburg College	79	79	158	15	12	185	85
Shawanee Community College	77	81	158	18	15	191	83
College of DuPage Quarter Calendar	58	107 **	165	15	7	187	88

** The Spring Quarter Instructional Days is the sum for Winter and Spring quarters.

NOTES:
Instruction Days do not include Saturdays and Sundays as well as days for orientation registration, and commencement when instruction is not offered.

Days Between Fall and Spring Semesters do not include weekends.

Public holidays and recesses include Easter break, Fall and Spring breaks, Labor Day, Abraham Lincoln Day, Martin Luther King Day, and Thanksgiving holidays. Some campuses do not observe some of these holidays.

Table 3

SUMMARY OF ACADEMIC CALENDAR OF SELECTED PRIVATE COLLEGES
AND UNIVERSITIES FOR FALL 1992 AND SPRING 1993 SEMESTERS AND QUARTERS

INSTITUTION	Fall 1992 Instruction Days	Spring 1993 Instruction Days	Fall/ Spring Total	Week Days Between Terms	Holidays/ Semester Breaks	Total Days	Instructional Days as % of Total
Blackburn College	73	76	149	16	9	174	86
Bradley University	77	77	154	10	10	174	89
Columbia College	74	76	150	15	17	182	82
DeVry Inst. of Technology	72	74	146	5	14	165	88
Illinois Inst. of Technology	78	80	158	21	8	187	84
Roosevelt University	76	76	152	24	8	184	83
Springfield College	75	75	150	15	13	178	84
Knox College Trimester and a December mini term.	53	103 **	156	10	0	166	94
Northwestern University Quarter calendar	59	112 **	171	15	3	189	90
University of Chicago Quarter calendar	56	111 **	167	10	3	180	93

** The Spring Quarter Instructional Days is the sum for Winter and Spring quarters.

NOTES:

Instruction Days do not include Saturdays and Sundays as well as days for orientation, registration, and commencement when instruction is not offered.

Days Between Fall and Spring Semesters do not include weekends.

Public holidays and recesses include Easter break, Fall and Spring breaks, Labor Day, Abraham Lincoln Day, Martin Luther King Day, and Thanksgiving holidays. Some campuses do not observe some of these holidays.

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